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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0402
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0135
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0116
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000257

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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE: GOAJ,
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BEGINNING TO RESPOND

REF: BAKU 235

Classified By: DCM Jason P. Hyland per 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) International pressure on the GOAJ to take avian influenza seriously appears to have prompted the GOAJ to take action. Following Ambassador and UN Resident Coordinator,s February 14 approach to Prime Minister Rasizade (reftel) and European Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner,s February 16 pitch on avian influenza (septel), Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on February 16 issued a decree establishing a "State Commission for Preventing Avian Influenza." The decree orders all state agencies to work together on the issue. It is chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Abbasov and includes the Ministers of Agriculture, Economic Development, Finance, Ecology and Natural Resources, Emergency Situations, Health, Internal Affairs, as well as the Chairman for the State Customs Committee, the Head of the State Border Service. According to the decree, the role of the commission is:

¶A. By February 18, 2006, prepare and approve an emergency action plan on preventive measures against Avian Influenza (AI).

¶B. Ensure the daily provision of information on AI to the mass media.

¶C. Present to the Cabinet of Minister a proposal on financing the preventive measures against AI, using funds from the state budget and international institutions.

¶D. Constantly inform the President of Azerbaijan on the implemented activities.

¶E. Implement other corresponding activities.

¶2. (SBU) The Minister of Agriculture is also calling together the diplomatic corps on February 20 for a briefing on AI. We will report out after that meeting, including targeted requests to Washington for further assistance.

¶3. (SBU) Post remains actively engaged on AI. The week of February 13 seemed to see some positive developments in the international donor coordination. UNICEF has been taking the

lead coordination role and is slowly bringing the WHO with it. At a February 16 donor coordination meeting, donors reviewed the findings of WHO's February assessment and agreed that US would take lead on technical training and Japan would take the lead on laboratory assistance. The new, non-Azerbaijani director of the Baku office of the World Health Organization seems to be much more engaged and honest about the WHO's capabilities. EU countries seem to just beginning to be engaged on the issue, and post suspects that in the next month there will more involvement from these countries.

14. (C) The biggest issues remain surveillance and testing. Azerbaijani, to date, is not able to fully perform these functions and has sent samples out for testing at an international reference lab only after repeated interventions from the U.S. Embassy. For some time, it appeared the GOAJ's inability was as much the result of a lack of will as a lack of knowledge. However, recent meetings with the Prime Minister, and the promulgation of a presidential decree -- even if it simply ratifies the GOAJ's existing structure for dealing with AI -- appear to have solidified some will within the GOAJ. Post is optimistic that the new acting country director of the WHO will be more forthcoming on the limitations of the WHO, and more proactive and efficacious in assisting the GOAJ. The UN community (namely UNICEF), in cooperation with the Azerbaijani government, is completing a television public service announcement, though the content of the announcement was still somewhat unclear at the February 16 donors meeting. Most immediately, the donors committee is in the final stages of being able to provide additional personal protective equipment.

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15. (U) During the week of 13 February, post was successful in getting a 30-second public service announcement about AI into three of the six local television stations. This thirty-second PSA was produced by USAID in Kiev, and post substituted a voice over in the Azerbaijani language. The PSAs have been running often on television and radio.

16. (C) COMMENT: With the establishment of the State Committee on Avian Influenza, and the personnel changes at the Baku office of the WHO, post is guardedly optimistic that the tide may be turning on the AI issue in Azerbaijani, from the standpoint of the government's understanding of and engagement on the issue. That said, the State Committee does not have the technical know-how or experience to implement a robust surveillance and testing program. Additionally, most of the individuals on the committee whom post has dealt with on AI in the past have been unhelpful at best and intransigent/obstructionist at worst. Hopefully, President Aliyev's engagement on this issue will change things.

17. (C) COMMENT, CONTINUED: Post is encouraged by the active role UNICEF is playing in organizing the international donors. While it does not have any technical expertise, the UNICEF director is a good organizer and planner. That it has fallen to the UNICEF director to coordinate the UN response speaks as much to the impotency of the local WHO office, and disengagement of other UN representatives in Azerbaijan, such as UNDP, on this issue. Amidst what may be termed an impending crisis, FAO has no personnel on the ground working with the veterinary service or Ministry of Agriculture. The UK and German embassies have both expressed private concerns to embassies about the UN's disjointed response. Given this vacuum, other international donors have been forced to assume a larger role. In addition to the valuable work of UNICEF, Post has appreciated the flexibility and involvement of the Japanese Embassy which is in discussions with Tokyo about sending a health expert/consultant to Baku permanently, to work on all health issues arising from AI. The Japanese government also is finalizing the details on sending two Azerbaijanis to Japan for technical training. More than a month after large bird deaths were first reported in

Azerbaijan, the GOAJ appears to be coming around. The UN, after a dismal start and much prodding by the Embassy and international community, may be doing the same.

HARNISH